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The Question of Theodicy in Islamic Philosophy—Suggesting a Solution: *Badāʾ*

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Abstract: The problem of evil is one that has earned much attention in recent decades and is frequently used as a justification for atheism, and increasingly so due to the rise in popularity of secularism and atheism. How is the issue of theodicy considered in Islamic philosophy, and especially in Shīʿa theology? Does this problem arise there at all? The following discussion addresses these questions, examining the basis of the so-called 'problem of evil' through the rationale and multiple perspectives offered by Islamic Shīʿa theology on the issue. First, some verses in the Qurʾān dealing with evil and suffering will be illuminated. After that, some mutakallimūn's views will be presented. Following that, the problem of evil will be investigated from the perspectives of Ibn Sīnā and Mullā Ṣadrā. After briefly highlighting the mystical perspective, finally, a practical theological solution according to Shīʿa theology known as *badāʾ* will be introduced.

Keywords: Islamic philosophy; mysticism; theodicy; evil; being; *tawḥīd*; *wujūd*; *ʿadam*; *badāʾ*; Mullā Ṣadrā; Ibn Sīnā

1. Introduction

One of the main questions in human belief, regardless of religious affiliation, is the question of theodicy. This term itself deals with answering the question of how the existence of an almighty, kind, and gracious God can be compatible with the simultaneous existence of evil. This article attempts to shed light on this problem from the perspective of Islamic philosophy.[1] Augustine (354–430), a philosopher belonging to the Christian faith, believed that humans come into this world guilty and that this stems from original sin. He claimed that Adam's sin affects all human beings; that Adam's was not just a personal sin (Fürst 1999, p. 200). Islamic theologians and philosophers, on the other hand, believe that humans come into this world innocent and commit sin of their own free will.[2]

Human beings are confronted with suffering throughout their lives. As it is said in the Qurʾān, 'Truly We created man in travail' (90:4).[3] The creation and existence of mankind is itself entwisted with suffering, making it a universal phenomenon. The question is, why does suffering exist at all, and what is the purpose and aim of all this suffering? Different approaches have been found for this religious and philosophical challenge. Some sects or faiths, such as Zoroastrians, have accepted the existence of evil as a separate and independent entity from God and believe in a fundamental duality in the world. Zoroastrian theology accepts the notion of two different versions of God: the evil in the world is created by *Ahriman* (the evil spirit in the world), while good comes from *Ahura Mazda* (the creator deity). Their belief in objective evil necessitates the existence of these two different versions of God. This is in contradiction to the Islamic doctrine of *tawḥīd*, which teaches the singularity and incomparability of God. Apart from this, the idea that God himself has created evil is not acceptable either, as this would be in contradiction to his attributes, especially that of justice. Whether the principle of non-contradiction applies to the existence of evil itself or to the attributes of God, the Zoroastrian belief is untenable from an Islamic perspective.[4]

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The question of theodicy has led to crises of faith in many people, causing them to doubt the existence of God altogether. David Hume (1711–1776) is among these, proffering the following discussion:

> "Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" (Hume 1779, p. 186).

John Leslie Mackie (1917–1981), an Australian philosopher of religion, addressed the problem of evil thus:

> "In its simplest form, the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions so that if any two of them were true, the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three." (Mackie 1955, p. 200)

How can this conflict be solved? Different approaches to this problem will be introduced in the following section, starting with the Qurʾānic approach.

2. Evil and Suffering in the Qurʾān

The first question is what exactly is evil at all, and does the general human understanding of evil concur with the concept of evil in the Qurʾān? The Arabic term for evil in the Qurʾān is *sharr*, whereas the opposite, or good, is *khayr*. It is clearly stated in the Qurʾān that when someone, through his own volition, acts in certain ways and adopts specific behaviours that are not in accordance with the divine plan, he situates himself in a condition that is referred to in the Qurʾān as *sharr*.

> "And let not those who are miserly with what God has given them from His Bounty suppose that it is good for them; rather it is evil for them. On the Day of Resurrection, they will be collared by that with which they were miserly. And unto God belongs the inheritance of the heaven and the earth, and God is Aware of whatsoever you do." (Q 3:180)

The creation of the universe and of humankind was purposeful and not in vain. Humans, therefore, must make a serious effort to live their lives according to God's cosmic plan. By neglecting the purpose for God's creation and the accountabilities that it entails, mankind creates undesirable living conditions for themselves, i.e., *sharr*. Not living in accordance with God's cosmic plan—which in Islamic terminology can be understood as not living in accordance with the rules of *sharīʿah*—will lead to one becoming the worst of living creatures, and not living according to God's plan is the same as being deaf and dumb (Q 8:22).

What does living according to God's plan mean? Living in line with God's plan means submitting to God alone, which also means being thankful for everything in life. God has created humans with the faculties of thinking and understanding (*ʿaql*) and has given them the power to distinguish right from wrong. In other words, humans have been given freedom of will, and they are the appointed successor of God on earth (*khalīfat Allāh*):

> "And when thy Lord said to the angels,
> 'I am placing a vicegerent upon the earth,'
> they said, 'Wilt Thou place therein one who
> will work corruption therein and shed blood,
> while we hymn Thy praise and call Thee Holy?'
> He said, 'Truly I know what you know not.'" (Q 2:30)

Due to human freedom, the human being is a dichotomous being: he sheds blood on earth and causes corruption, and on the other hand, he is appointed as the successor of

God. God says to the angels that he knows something that they do not know, which is a reference to individual agency and freedom of choice and will. Although individuals are created according to God's plan (*fiṭrah*: our inner God-seeking ability), it is the freedom of choice of the believer to follow this plan of God—because he knows our 'manual' or 'operation instructions' best— but a believer could also choose not to follow this plan.

If man chooses to follow evil, he will be confronted with corruption and frustration. However, not every bad occurrence is because of human beings' freedom of choice; sometimes something bad occurs in order to prevent something worse from happening.

> "Truly those who brought forth the lie were a group among you. Do not suppose it to be an evil for you. Rather, it is a good for you. Unto each man among them is the sin he committed. And he among them who undertook the greater part of it, his shall be a great punishment." (Q 24:11)

Due to the finiteness and hastiness of human beings, they do not always know what is good and what is evil for them (Q 17:11). Thus, everything that occurs in life is good for him from a universal, cosmic perspective: It is *khayr*.

> "As for man, whenever his Lord tests him, then honors him and blesses him, he says, 'My Lord has honored me.' And as for whenever He tries him and straitens his provision, he says, 'My Lord has abased me.'" (Q 89:15–16)

According to the Qurʾān, an evil occurrence can also be regarded as a test (Q 21:35). Every evil is an examination, and the human spirit cannot achieve its level of perfection without this (Q 67:2).

Evil as a test or examination is also regarded in the story of the Prophet Job (*Ayyūb*) in the Qurʾān. When the *nafs* (human soul) becomes complete and strong and reduces its dependence on the body, then the person will return to their roots and there find absolute happiness (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 8, pp. 123–24). Then the person will become like Job the Prophet, who is a famous figure in both the Jewish and Christian traditions as well as in Islam and is depicted in the Qurʾān as exemplifying genuine devotion to God, gratitude through generosity, endurance, and patience when afflicted with illness and adversity. He is described in the Qurʾān as such (Q 21:83–84) due to his absolute submission to God during hardship and affliction.

Thus, in the examination of God, there is no negative aspect at all; rather, every aspect is blessed. There are sometimes events in the lives of human beings which we interpret as negative, but which are in fact good for us (Q 2:216). This is also true in regard to the concept of substantial movement, which will be described later. Sometimes punishment also has a training or educational aspect (Q 7:130).

However, when a human being is not thankful to God for all the blessings given to them, nor educated with punishment, and thus denies God, then God will leave them and not reveal anything to them (Q 7:64).

God gives human beings the free will to choose between what he loves and hates. One question that arises here is why human beings are created with free will to choose between good and bad if they will be punished afterwards. Why can a human being not always choose well? This choice between good and evil is precisely what makes man a successor of God on earth (*khalīfat Allāh*). While angels do not have the freedom in choosing their way, and their actions are according to their created plan, man is *khalīfat Allāh* because he can also act as a tyrant, impeding his God-given, innate ability (*fiṭrah*) to see right and truth. The obscuring of this innate ability will lead to a life full of *sharr*. Now the question of the meaning of *fiṭrah*, this innate ability is instilled in the soul of all human beings at birth. This is said in Qurʾān 30:30.

The Qurʾānic response to the problem of evil and suffering can be summed up thus: Instances of evil occur to test a human being's free will (Q 67:2), to guide those who have become misguided (Q 16:53), and to remind human beings to return back to God (Q 30:41). Evil might also occur to turn away a greater harm, such as the death of an individual who might later cause more harm or experience greater suffering (Q 18:65–82). Suffering

might occur as a blessing in disguise, where it serves as a test the moment disaster strikes (Q 2:216). Suffering might also occur in order to instil gratitude in one that has taken all that they have for granted (e.g., good health) (Q 14:7); it might occur in order to reveal a person's true colors (Q 29:2–3). Further, suffering might occur in order for people to learn lessons from the mistakes of prior nations and people (Q 10:92).

3. The *mutakallimūn*'s View on Theodicy

The Islamic scholastic theology, or *ʿilm al-kalām*, is a discipline which discusses fundamental Islamic beliefs and doctrines. Among the *mutakallimūn*, the scholars of *ʿilm al-kalām*, who are called the first group to debate about the justice of God, was the Muʿtazilah, a Sunni unorthodox *kalām* school.

To answer the question of how to reconcile the justice of a powerful God with the evil that exists in the world, the Muʿtazilah response is that God is just and wise and therefore cannot act contrarily. As such, evil arises from the errors of humans and their free will. For example, ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī (969–1025) says:

> Justice has the meaning that all the actions of God are good. Bad happenings do not come from him and he doesn't lie in the *khayr* which arises from him. His *ḥikmah* is not unfair. The children of the idol worshipper (*mushrik*) won't be blamed for what their parents have done (ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī al-Asadābādī 1996, p. 133).

Contrary to this, the Sunni orthodox *kalām* school, the Ashʿariyyah, believe that the measure of justice is the act of God and not the intellect of the people (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī 1985, pp. 342–43). According to this belief, humans do not necessarily always know what justice is. This means that the Ashʿariyyah do not emphasize the attribute of God's justice; rather, they claim that God is not obligated to act according to *lutf* (kindness) and *ṣulḥ* (resolution).

Concerning God's justice, the great Sufi theologian, philosopher, and famous *mutakallīm* of the Ashʿarī belief system, Al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), claims that this world is 'the best of all possible worlds,'[5] with God as the necessary being and of whom a greater being is unimaginable. In other words, God's actions are the best and most complete in the world, and therefore, everything which is created is a being in its best and most complete form. Al-Ghazālī further mentions trust, or *tawakkul*, in regard to God's plan and says that although there is uncertainty in the world, there is no better, more complete world than our currently existing one (al-Ghazālī 1963, vol. 13, p. 181).

4. *Sharr* from the Perspectives of Ibn Sīnā and Mullā Ṣadrā

From the Islamic philosophical perspective, good and evil are regarded in the ontological understanding of existence (*wujūd*) and nonexistence (*ʿadam*). Philosophers like Ibn Sīnā (980–1037), known as Avicenna in the West, in his work *al-Shifā* (Ibn Sīnā 1984), and Mullā Ṣadrā in his work *al-Asfār al-arbaʿah*, among his other works, engage extensively with the problem of evil. Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Yaḥyā Qawāmī Shīrāzī (1571–1636), the most significant Islamic philosopher after Avicenna, was later given the title of Ṣadr al-Mutaʾallihīn (or Mullā Ṣadrā). His philosophy was an approach that combined theology with Islamic mystical intuition and is referred to as 'transcendent philosophy.' This philosophy is an interdisciplinary combination of peripatetic discursive philosophy and illuminist philosophical methods with a mystical approach. The French orientalist, Henry Corbin (1903–1978), says that Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy leads on to a phenomenology of the Holy Spirit (Corbin 1993, p. 344) and he has put a personal stamp on Shī'īte awareness at the level of its philosophical expressions and manifestations (ibid., p. 342).

5. *Ibn Sīnā*

In chapter six of Book IX of his Metaphysics, Ibn Sīnā deals with the problem of theodicy. While describing the problem of evil and raising the question of how the long

tradition of theodicy discussions began, he introduces the idea of providence (*ʿināyah*). According to this notion of divine providence, God has absolute knowledge of everything in the world and, because he is the creator of the world, knows what is best for everything (Ibn Sīnā 1997, p. 450). God's providence falls under the category of his wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and, combined with his knowledge (*ʿilm*), makes this world the best possible world. God is, for Ibn Sīnā, the absolute *khayr bi-l-dhāt*, and his providence belongs to his essence (*dhāt*) (Ibn Sīnā 1909, p. 125). This means that everything that he has created comes from his goodness. Ibn Sīnā addresses the problem of theodicy by naming two differing types of evil: essential evil (*al-sharr bi-l-dhāt*) and accidental evil (*al-sharr bi-l-ʿaraḍ*),[6] of which the latter refers to categories of preventing perfection, also called 'non-being' (*ʿadam*), while the former is the cause of human suffering (Ibn Sīnā 1997, p. 451). Ibn Sīnā defined evil as inadequacy, privation (*naqṣ*), and a general lack of good, which is called *ʿadam*. The absolute or essential evil (*al-sharr bi-l-dhāt*) refers to the absolute *ʿadam*, and since there is no absolute *ʿadam* in the outside world, absolute evil also does not exist. Furthermore, there is no being which could be characterized as the absolute *sharr* (ibid., pp. 451–58). According to Ibn Sīnā, it is not right to say that God could be blamed for a lack of good in the world, because he is the absolute good (*khayr*).

6. *Mullā Ṣadrā*

Mullā Ṣadrā combines his theological approach with a mystical perspective. He states that since God is the necessary being, he is the absolute good. To answer the question of evil in this world, Mullā Ṣadrā claims that if the world were absolute *khayr*, then it would not be physical. Fire, for example, has the property and characteristic to burn, and as such, could not exist without having the property of burning—which can be good or bad (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 7, p. 78). For Mullā Ṣadrā, the absolute or essential bad (*al-sharr bi-l-dhāt*) is seen as a non-being (*ʿadam*) (ibid., 63). According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the *māhiyyah* or the essence of evil and the answer to the question 'What kind of thing is it?'. . . is the non-being of evil (Muṭahharī 2020).

Another theory of Mullā Ṣadrā is that existing beings (*mawjūdāt*) have a united being on two different levels: connected existence (*wujūd al-rabṭ*) and independent existence (*al-wujūd al-mustaqill*) (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 1, p. 103). In other words, the reality of being has two levels, one of which is the independent existence (God) and the other, which is inferior, the connected existence (all other life forms) (ibid.). Every created being depends on independent existence because it has received his own being from it. This hierarchy continues to the lowest level of being, which encompasses the material world. All of these connected beings must reach the independent being from whom they received their existence (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 1, p. 306). Mullā Ṣadrā's theory that existence precedes essence is called *aṣālat al-wujūd* (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 1, p. 162). This one being is the source of all essences (*māhiyyah*) in the world (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 1, pp. 344–45). Every *mumkin al-wujūd* (contingent being) has two aspects of being. On the one hand, it has a real being within it, which it has received from the absolute being due to its connected existence to the independent existence of being. On the other hand, the *mumkin al-wujūd* has an aspect of non-real being, which is *ʿadam* (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 1, p. 302).

According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the side of *māhiyyah* that springs from the connected being is the source of evil in the world. Since evil also has no real being, it is *ʿadam*, which indicates the absence of *khayr* (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 2, p. 359).

This does not mean that it does not exist, but rather that evil is the absence of pure being and is thus a deficiency. In other words, it has reality (*wāqiʿiyyah*), but no truth (*ḥaqīqah*). Ultimately, our being, as we are born, is good, according to our inner intuitive instinct (*fiṭrah*).

The philosopher, mystic theologian, and poet Ḥājj Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī (1797–1873), who was influenced by the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā, refers to this aspect of the philosophy of *aṣālat al-wujūd*. He states that everything that is *ʿadam* (non-being) can be categorized

as *sharr* and points out that the idea of evil as being non-existent or non-being (*ʿadam)* is right (Sabziwārī 2004, pp. 182–83). He claims that the aspects of the world exist in relativity to each other. For example, the fact that the senses of smell, sight, and touch exist means that beings with these faculties can be regarded as *khayr*; whereas blindness, death, and unawareness are *ʿadam* because they are non-being and could also be regarded as darkness (absence of light) (Muḥaqqiq and Izutsu 1981, pp. 54–55).

According to Islamic philosophy, the absolute good belongs to the necessary being (i.e., God) and everything that he has created. Therefore, *ʿadam*, or the evil in the world, is only a deviation from the necessary being. God created the inner intuitive instinct (*fiṭrah*) of human beings pure and without sin, and therefore, distance can be maintained from evil accordingly.

7. The Different Modulations of Being

In Islamic philosophy, it is believed that the aim of creation is the spiritual perfection of human beings. This is seen in Mullā Ṣadrā's theory of substantial movement (*al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah*) (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 8, p. 11),[7] which refers to gradual change or motion (*ḥarakah*):

> "The inner nature of being is fluid and the substantiality of substance is in the form of addiction of a strong degree to the previous weak degree [. . .] Ṣadrā also applies the principle of trans-substantial motion to his conception of man. The status of man or status of body is not constant: it is possible for a man to 'be' in many degrees, extending from the degree of demon with a human face to the sublime condition of the Perfect Man. [. . .] Much like gnostics, he maintains that the universe is constantly in motion and in a state of change, and at every movement it revives and renews" (Peerwani 2008, p. xxix).

Corbin describes this substantial movement as the following:

> His thesis that there are no immutable essences, but that each essence is determined and variable according to the degree of intensity of its act of existence, invokes another thesis, namely that of the intrasubstantial or transsubstantial movement that introduces movement into the category of substance. Mulla Sadra is the philosopher of metamorphoses, of transubstantiations (Corbin 1993, p. 343).

Mullā Ṣadrā's argument for substantial movement is based on the Qurʾān, where it is said:

> "Has there come upon man a span of time in which he was a thing unremembered? Truly We created man from a drop of mixed fluid that We may test him, and We endowed him with hearing and seeing" (Q 76:1–2).

The becoming process, according to substantial movement, is the movement from potentiality (*quwwah*) to actuality (*fiʿl*). These two terms are taken from the philosophy of Aristotle: Potentiality refers to the potential growth that something possesses when nothing stops it, while actuality is the fulfilment of that possibility. Accordingly, the soul is in the process of becoming and should be actualized. In other words, it is moving from potentiality to actuality until it becomes perfect. This transition is a transformation from a material being to a rational being, which occurs after death, when the soul leaves the realm of substantial and accidental movement and achieves an eternal life. In summary, the soul is material at birth and with the passage of time becomes rational until, after death, it is non-material and remains as such.

Mullā Ṣadrā clearly formulates that the soul is physical in its creation and spiritual in its unending existence: '*inna l-nafs al-insāniyyah jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth wa-rūḥāniyyat al-baqāʾ*' (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 8, p. 347).

Perfection for Mullā Ṣadrā means the emergence of the soul. In other words, the perfect soul, which attains its spiritual stage, should pass through all the stages of existence in their entirety. Without passing through all the levels of existence, neither actualization

nor perfection have been accomplished. However, the human soul is changeable because the soul is becoming and moving. The substantial movement and transformation of the human soul only causes a kind of extension in the reality of the mover. Mullā Ṣadrā has called this specific substantial evolution of the form 'coming into a perfected existence after coming into existence.' It means coming into existence in a more existentially and extended form compared with the previous state. Therefore, one could say that the reality of the individual human being is identified by his shape, which is his specific human soul (Peerwani 2008).

Thus, the progress of the soul, which is becoming and moving in this world, is accomplished through the perfection of intellect. The final stage is the ability of the soul to produce knowledge actively by being connected to the active intellect (Jahangiri 2022, p. 114).

Now the question arises of the relationship between Mullā Ṣadrā's theory of the progress of the soul and its substantial movement until it has reached perfection and its connection to the problem of evil. From the perspective of Mullā Ṣadrā, only God is the absolute power, the absolute goodness, and the absolute *khayr.* Evil (*sharr*) is in everything, and one would like to create distance from it, while *khayr* is every perfection, which one should seek. There is nothing in the world (besides God) that is not mixed with *sharr*, because everything is seeking its perfection according to substantial movement, and as long as it has not yet achieved union with the active intellect, it has aspects of non-being, and itself may not be *khayr* (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 7, p. 58). Poverty of the soul, or imperfection, is seen as *sharr*, whereas *khayr* is something that one has a passion for and is eager to achieve (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 9, p. 241).

According to Mullā Ṣadrā's ontology, being (*wujūd*) is the fountainhead of *khayr*, and because God is the necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*), only *khayr* can arise from Him. Thus, *sharr* comes not from God or being, but from *māhiyyah*, which is a poor state of being. In Mullā Ṣadrā's view, the hereafter is the inner essence of this world, and the reality of hell is a combination of the earth and the hereafter; because its *māddah* is evil and *ʿadam*, hell is automatically painful (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 9, p. 369). The theory of substantial movement claims that with our creation, we are gifted with the blessing of being (*wujūd*) by God. Every human being has their own path to follow, and if man can fulfil his duty and move forward according to substantial movement, then the blessings from heaven and earth will become available to him. It is said in the Qurʾān:

> "Had the people of the towns believed and been reverent, We would surely have opened unto them blessings from Heaven and earth. But they denied, so We seized them for that which they used to earn" (Q 7:96).

However, Mullā Ṣadrā says that the best solution and response to the problem of evil is the response in mysticism (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1998, p. 278).

8. The Problem of Theodicy from a Mystical Perspective

In Islamic theology, the emphasis is on God's knowledge (*ʿilm*) and his wisdom (*ḥikmah*). The problem of Western philosophers who deny the existence of God because of the evil in the world is that they do not have a holistic approach to the world and only a partial view on the bad occurrences (Muṭahharī 2020).

God's wisdom (*ḥikmah*) is not equated with God's love. The emphasis on God's knowledge and wisdom cannot be overlooked when discussing evil in any of its forms, as one finds when closely studying the Qurʾān. In the story of Mūsā (Moses) and al-Khiḍr, for example, the evil acts of Khiḍr in sinking a boat and killing a boy are initially problematic for Mūsā, as both his knowledge and wisdom for judging that scenario are limited (Q 18:65–82). Thus, Mūsā questions al-Khiḍr's 'evil' actions, and al-Khiḍr explains that this certain knowledge comes from God, who has taught him:

> "There they found a servant from among Our servants whom We had granted a mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Our presence" (Q 18:65).

From an aesthetic point of view, there exists the belief that the existence of evil is only tolerated along with the good in order to increase the beauty of the good (Fayḍ Kāshānī 2009, p. 83). In other words, a world with a few bad things is better than a world absent of bad things altogether. In a similar manner, Fayḍ Kāshānī (1598–1680) says that things are recognizable due to their opposite (ibid.). As another example, al-Ghazālī says that things are known through their opposites, so one cannot really enjoy health without sickness (al-Ghazālī 1963, vol. 14, p. 86). Similarly, C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) articulated, "A man does not call something crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line" (C. S. Lewis 2009).

The Iranian mystic poet Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (1207–1273) says about the evil in the world that it is relative and that an absolute evil does not exist:

> *pas bad-i muṭlaq nabāshad dar jahān*
>
> *bad bi nisbat bāshad īn rā bidān*
>
> [. . .]
>
> *zahr-i mār ān mār rā bāshad ḥayāt*
>
> *nisbatash bā ādamī bāshad mamāt* (Rūmī 1975, book four)
>
> So, the absolute evil doesn't exist in the world,
>
> Evil is relative, you know this!
>
> The snake venom is for the snake a life protector,
>
> But for human beings it is annihilating.

Referring to the acts of human beings, one can say that people learn bad actions during their lifetime. Even Satan, who wants to tempt people, has no power in the processes of creation (*takwīn*) but does so in the practical religious lifestyle (*tashrīʿ*). What is most important, rather, is how people themselves handle the bad and evil that comes to them. It can lead them closer to the aim of creation and help them gain more being, or it can lead them to lose their true being and come closer to non-being. Evil as a kind of examination is demonstrated by the Iranian poet Niẓāmī (1141–1209), who wrote (Niẓāmī Ganjawī 2020, Khusraw wa-Shīrīn):

> *ču bad kardī mabāsh īman zi āfāt*
>
> *ki wājib shud ṭabīʿat rā mukāfat*
>
> Having done wrong, don't feel secure from the evil.
>
> Punishing you is now an obligation for nature.

According to this, nothing will be left unreciprocated. Similarly, in the Qurʾān, it is said:

> "So whosoever does a mote's weight of good shall see it" (Q 99:7); "And whosoever does a mote's weight of evil shall see it" (Q 99:8).
>
> According to the Islamic view and in accordance with the transcendent theosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā (*al-ḥikmah al-mutaʿāliyyah*), the entire world is a manifestation of God's blessing and grace (*raḥmah*), and nothing will come from God without his knowledge in this. Even a snake, a scorpion, or other predators, with all their potential to bring harm, also provide benefits to the world. Even the existence of Iblis, who is the absolute manifestation of evil, is necessary for the chain of being because everything is dependent upon everything else (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1991, vol. 8, p. 39).

Speaking of evil from a deep mystical and aesthetic point of view, one is reminded of the significant historical event of the Battle of Karbalāʾ. Zaynab, the daughter of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the granddaughter of the Prophet Muḥammad and the sister of Ḥusayn ibn

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, witnessed death, bloodshed, cruelty, and beheadings by arrows, spears, and swords during the battle. While Ḥusayn is seen as a model for the annihilation of the self in the path of God in Islamic mysticism (Schimmel 1986, p. 30) and is regarded as the master of the martyrs of the world, there is little discussion about his sister Zaynab, who is known as the mother of sorrow. Zaynab was the one left alone in Damascus while the world grieved the death of her brother. She was the one who saw her mother, Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad, attacked and killed in her own home, her father's right stolen, and her brother killed by arrows. She was the one who stood on al-Tall al-Zaynabiyyah to watch the fate of her brother Ḥusayn during the Battle of Karbalāʾ. Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān (646–683), the second caliph of the ʿUmayyad Caliphate, said to Zaynab while in a drunken state that he thanked God that he humiliated her and asked her: 'How did you see God's work?' Zaynab replied: 'I saw nothing but beauty.'

What did Zaynab mean when she said she saw nothing but beauty on the plains of Karbalāʾ (*mā raʾaytu illā jamīlan*)? Where was the beauty in all this? There is great mysticism and ʿ*irfān* (knowledge) in her statement: She saw the beauty in ʿĀshūrāʾ because it was the manifestation of devotion to God's will. It was a dividing line of absolute truth and absolute wrong.

It is said in the holy Qurʾān:

> "And among mankind is one who sells his soul seeking God's Good Pleasure, and God is Kind unto His servants" (Q 2:207).

Elsewhere in the holy Qurʾān, it is said:

> "Truly God has purchased from the believers their souls and their wealth in exchange for the Garden being theirs. They fight in the way of God, slaying and being slain. [It is] a promise binding upon Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is truer to His pact than God? So rejoice in the bargain you have made. That indeed is the great triumph" (Q 9:111).

We sell and enslave ourselves to worldly attractions on a daily basis, so who are those who sell themselves explicitly to God? Who are those that make this transaction with God? And if God is the purchaser of souls, then who are the sellers? Are they those who seek the true pleasure and approval of God? These were people who were chosen to be martyred in the path of God, and in the hereafter, God will pronounce a verdict between them (Majlisī 1983, vol. 45, pp. 115–16). The person who is for God, God will be for him (Majlisī 1983, vol. 79, p. 197).[8] On the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ, on the bloody plains of Karbalāʾ, this transaction took place; i.e., the selling and purchasing of souls. Zaynab saw the beauty of this transaction between God and her brother Ḥusayn. In other words, she saw the highest manifestation of *taslīm* (submission, absolute obedience, and loyalty towards God) in Karbalāʾ.

The statement 'nothing but beauty' is the combination of *shukr* (gratitude) and *ṣabr* (patience), as it is said in the Qurʾān:

> "And you do not will but that God wills. Truly God is Knowing, Wise" (Q 76:30).

In order to summarize, in Islamic Shīʿa theology, it is stated that from a mystical perspective, evil has positive aspects in both theoretical *tawḥīd* (*al-tawḥīd al-naẓarī)* and practical *tawḥīd* (*al-tawḥīd al-ʿamalī*) ways because it can lead to the point of satisfaction (*riḍā*) (al-Kulaynī 1996, vol. 4, p. 709).

9. Problems

None of the presented theories, with the exception of that from the mystical perspective with the slogan of *taslīm*, offers a real solution for the problem of theodicy. However, there has been a debate on what should be done from a practical theological perspective. For example, the German Islamic scholar and writer Navid Kermani (b. 1967) offers the view that one can complain towards God, and revolt, even, but still be a believer (Kermani 2011). This is an example of negative theology.

From the perspective of the author of this article, however, this cannot be acceptable based on the view of the Shīʿa school of thought. The perspective of Iranian scholar, theorist, philosopher, and one of the most prominent thinkers of modern Shīʿa Islam, Muḥammad Ḥasan Mīr Jahānī Ṭabāṭabāʾī, is that this approach cannot provide a solution to the problem. Rather, the believer must have the proper level of devotion (*ʿubūdiyyah*) and should behave in complete obedience towards God (Mīr Jahānī Ṭabāṭabāʾī 2019, p. 171). From the mystical-theological perspective, there is no 'I' at all which could regard itself as someone capable of complaining. Everything which exists is only God. As a result, this negative theology is not a true or practical solution within the realm of theology.

Another problem is that these theodicy debates are only theories and cannot give a satisfactory answer for someone who is suffering or has lost a loved one. Understanding the meaning of evil (*sharr*) from Mullā Ṣadrā's point of view requires the study of philosophy because it is difficult to comprehend that evil is non-being (it is an *ʿadam*) (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1981, p. 83). The question arises, what does it mean when he says that evil is a non-being? Is it non-existent? When someone, for example, feels pain in their arm, that pain exists in reality. How should we understand the non-being of evil? This is the most difficult part of the theodicy of Mullā Ṣadrā. On the other hand, in his last work, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, he tries to reexplain *sharr* and says that perceptional evils do have a being and have *wujūd* (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1994, p. 414).

A further question is whether these theoretical theodicy debates could lead to a passivity within society in the form of a refusal to actively help suffering people due to the argument that they should suffer because that is what God wanted for them. Most of the theories for the problem of evil introduced above are known in Western philosophy, and the German Catholic theologian Klaus von Stosch regards some solutions to the theodicy as functionalization, pedagogization, or a teleological depotentiation[9] (von Stosch 2018, p. 151). However, so far, we have not seen a practical solution for the problem of theodicy from the Islamic theological or philosophical perspective. An attempt at this will be made in the following section.

10. A Practical Theological Solution

In the following, a practical theological solution from a Shīʿa point of view will be introduced, which is based on free will. According to this theory, the concept of *badāʾ*,[10] the destiny of human beings is changeable, even if it is determined. *Badāʾ* means the change of non-deterministic destinies by God based on the voluntary actions of man and based on certain special conditions and factors. *Badāʾ*, according to the Shīʿa tradition, is applicable both to the creation (*takwīn*), as changing the time of someone's death by means of *ṣadaqah* (voluntary charity) or *ṣilat al-raḥim* (keeping good relations with relatives), and also to the law of the *sharīʿah* (*tashrīʿ*); for example, in changing the direction of the *qiblah* or in the abrogation (*naskh*) of other religions with the Qurʾān (Shaykh Ṣadūq 1996, pp. 335–36). One example of the theory of *badāʾ* that is mentioned in the Qurʾān is the verse: "…Truly God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves…" (Q 13:11). In other words, *badāʾ* means the changing and fixing of fate or destiny by God due to different reasons: "…God effaces what He will and establishes, and with Him is the Mother of the Book" (Q 13:39).

Taking into account that all Muslims believe that God is free from any ignorance and imperfection, this has caused the issue of *badāʾ* to be widely studied and researched in theological and exegetical sources, and books have been written independently in this field. In such books, two main points have been taken into consideration:

(A) Explaining the concept of *badāʾ* and stating how believing in it does not require ascribing ignorance to God.

(B) Clarifying that belief in *badāʾ* not only does not lead to an acceptance of defects, but can be effective in correcting man's attitude towards God's ruling and management of the world.

In the Qurʾān, the word *badāʾ* itself and the concept of it can be seen in various verses, some of which are mentioned below:

> Verses that express God's definite and non-definite judgment, such as Q 13:39; or they express the certain and non-certain death of humans, like verse Q 6:2; or verses that mention the change of people's destiny due to their voluntary actions, like Q 13:11 and Q 8:53.

It should be mentioned that the verses that refer to concrete examples of *badāʾ* refer to its specific cases, like the removal of punishment from the people of Yūnus due to their supplications in Q 10:98; changing God's command to Abraham regarding the slaughter of his son (Q 37:102–107); forbidding the children of Israel from entering the Holy Land for 40 years following their opposition to the command to enter it (Q 5:5, 21 and 26); or adding 10 days to the *mīqāt* of 30 nights of Moses, resulting in 40 nights (Q 7:142).

Commentators have also raised the issue of *badāʾ* with some other verses, such as the effects faith, piety, and asking for forgiveness might have in opening blessings from heaven and earth (Q 7:96; 71:10 and 11), the effect of certain acts in the increase or decrease in lifespan (Q 35:11), as well as the role of prayer and supplication during *laylat al-qadr* (the night of destiny), its effect on the transformation of non-obvious destiny (Q 44:4), and its connection with the verses of *badāʾ*.

The belief in *badāʾ* is seen as a sign of servitude (*ʿubūdiyyah*) and will be amply rewarded (al-Kulaynī 1996, vol. 1, p. 197). It is important to mention that this theory of *badāʾ* does not mean that something comes into being which is unknown to or hidden from God and will now be revealed (ibid., 198). God knows everything. Furthermore, the concept of *badāʾ* should be explored with respect to the two ideas of *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ* (the protected table)[11] and *lawḥ al-maḥw wa-l-ithbāt* (the fading table) (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 7, pp. 47–48). The *lawḥ al-maḥw* is so-called changeable destiny and *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ* is fixed destiny. *Badāʾ* takes place within *lawḥ al-maḥw.*

Al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ is the manifestation of God's knowledge (*ʿilm*) and the *lawḥ al-maḥw wa-l-ithbāt* is the manifestation of God's power (*qudrah*).

A hadith cited to Imam Sajjād says: "If there was not that one specific verse in the Qurʾān, I could tell you and foresee what exactly will happen, day by day, until the day of judgment." When he was asked what that verse is, he replied: "God effaces what He will and establishes, and with Him is the Mother of the Book" (Q 13:39) (al-Ḥuwayzī 1994, p. 512). This means that nothing in the future is determined or fixed and every predetermined happening for the future may undergo changes.

One example which is mentioned in the Qurʾān is the two different times of death of people. One is the fixed time of death and the other is the changeable time of death, which could be moved and shifted to a later time according to the deeds of the human being. The fixed time of death (Q 7:34, 10:49, or 16:61) is written in the table of *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*, and the changeable time of death (Q 6:2) is written in the table of *lawḥ al-maḥw wa-l-ithbāt*. God has absolute power and knowledge of both of them, and if human beings, for example, give *ṣadaqah*, behave kindly towards their neighbors, and are good towards other people, their time of death which was written in the *lawḥ al-maḥw wa-l-ithbāt* may change and move to another time. This does not mean that God did not know his or her time of death from the beginning. Furthermore, God's knowledge does not interfere with human beings' free will and decisions to act. In summary, there are some deeds which could delay the time of death, whereas other deeds could bring it sooner.

Does *badāʾ* mean that God changes what he had originally ordained? No, that does not mean that God did not know the real expediency from the beginning and then changed it. In other words, it does not mean that for God, something that was not known was revealed; rather, it means that God has worked on what was hidden to his servants.

Badāʾ is not fully understood by human beings because this belongs to the divine willpower of God. A change in destiny is because of God's expediency, and because of his good purpose, the new happening comes to revelation.

This concept of *badāʾ* has been criticized by the Sunni theological school because they have understood it wrongly. They believe that the reality of a happening was hidden from God and then later was revealed to him, and therefore he changed his plan (Gurjiyān 1996, vol. 1, p. 122). But this would be *kufr* according to Shīʿa theology, because the Shīʿa believe that new things are revealed by God through a change of direction and means. The expediency of the first thing remained until the emergence of the second thing, as has been said about the abrogation of *sharīʿah* rulings (ibid.).

The opponents of the concept of *badāʾ* have taken this idea with a lexical meaning and therefore proposed that it is impossible to assign it to God. They thought that God is also affected by the purpose of *badāʾ* like it applied to created beings. However, this is completely wrong according to Shīʿa belief. For example, Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq says that one should try to keep distance from those who support the idea that God suddenly changes his mind and plan and becomes aware of something that he was not aware of before (Majlisī 1983, vol. 4, p. 111).

While the proponents of *badāʾ* have considered defining this particular term in a way that is contrary to its lexical definition, *badāʾ* means the effects of both the good and bad actions of a person in the transformation of divine providence. For example, it is written in the Qurʾān: "...And there will appear unto them from God that which they had not reckoned", *wa-badā lahum mina llāhi mā lam yakūnū yaḥtasibūna* (Q 39:47).

This theory of *badāʾ* is also represented by Shīʿa philosophers like Mullā Ṣadrā. There are many different theories on *badāʾ*, but in this article, only Mullā Ṣadrā's view is presented. He says that it is difficult to understand the theory of *badāʾ*, and only a wise person (*ʿārif*) who knows and acknowledges *tawḥīd* can understand what it means (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1994, vol. 4, p. 177).

For Mullā Ṣadrā, *badāʾ* happens through angels in the seven heavens who are not in the highest degree of heaven but at a lower level; they are between the material world and the world of absolute intellect (*ʿuqūl al-maḥḍ*) (ibid., p. 191). Mullā Ṣadrā considers the protected tablet to be the same as the universal intellect *(al-ʿaql al-kullī)* (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, *Asfār*, vol. 7, p. 46).

The seven Qurʾānic heavens are, for Mullā Ṣadrā, the place of the active angels and could also be called *ʿālam al-mithāl* (the world of the similitudes or the world of imagination). Mullā Ṣadrā names this *ʿālam al-mithāl* as the *lawḥ al-maḥw wa-l-ithbāt* (the tablet which is changeable and well-kept) (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī 1988, p. 40) and interprets the verse Q 13:39 as referring to the *ʿālam al-mithāl* (ibid., 396). According to a hadith, God has sent no prophet without putting the idea of *badāʾ* in his plans (Majlisī 1983, vol. 4, p. 99).

From an anthropological perspective, the idea of *badāʾ* might first of all negate a deterministic view of the world. It could be regarded as a practical theological response to the problem of evil and promotes an initiative-taking lifestyle in which human beings know that they are able to change their destiny.

The concept of *badāʾ* is too complex and difficult to be explicated in detail in this work. However, the aim of this short explanation is to introduce a Shīʿa option for a practical response to the problem of theodicy based on human freedom.

11. Conclusions

In Islamic mysticism, evil is considered to be the result of a variety of things. While people are able to change their destiny based on the concept of *badāʿ*, an evil is either seen as a potential to come closer to perfection, as a response to our negative actions, or as an examination. Evil could occur to test a human being's free will (Q 67:2), to guide those who have become misguided (Q 16:53), or to remind human beings to return back to God (Q 30:41). The passing of an examination provides an enormous contribution to the development and the perfection of the human soul. It is said that evil contains good in itself (Muṭahharī 2020). However, the capability of a human being to handle the evil in their life very much depends on the individual. It is the actions of human beings that determine whether such a test leads to an increase or decrease in being (*wujūd*). Either it is

wa-ilayhi l-maṣīru "... and unto Him is the journey's end" (Q 5:18), or in the other direction, *wa-biʾsa l-maṣīru*, "an evil journey's end!" (Q 3:162).

As we have seen from the discussion of the views of the two Shīʿa philosophers Ibn Sīnā and Mullā Ṣadrā, Islamic, and especially Shīʿa, philosophy considers the response to the question of theodicy within the context of the practical lives of human beings. It not only provides a theoretical response to theodicy, but also one that is in contradiction to most of the European traditions. It provides clear guidelines for the believers, reminding them of the two consequences that will result from their actions. It should also be mentioned that this level of trust, *tawakkul*, spoken of by al-Ghazālī is one of the highest stations in the mystic path and plays a significant role in the spiritual development of man. As has been seen, according to the Shīʿa belief system, the deterministic view of the world of human beings is negated on the basis of the concept of *badāʿ* and the not-yet-fixed destinies, which are written in *lawḥ al-maḥw wa-l-ithbāt* and are subject to change. Therefore, in view of the idea of *badāʿ*, the problem of theodicy could be regarded as being solved in the Shīʿa belief system because humans have the freedom and optimism that their future life can change according to their deeds and acts of today.

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Notes

1 There is no orthodoxy and blasphemy in Islam in the meaning that exist in Christian culture. The aim of this article is not to do a comparison between the European philosophy and the Islamic philosophy. Therefore, a consideration of theodicy in European philosophy is rather superficial and many western philosophers, like, for example, Leibniz' idea of pre-established harmony, is not mentioned here.

2 For instance: Qurʾān 53:39, 17:15 or 30:30.

3 *La-qad khalaqnā fī kabadin.* All English translations from the Qurʾān in this article were taken from *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary.* All other English translations, where not otherwise indicated, are done by the author.

4 The problem of evil in Zoroastrianism is here only indicated as background information and dwelling too much on it would go beyond the scope of this investigation; therefore, it is only named with the purpose to prepare the respected reader to the following investigation.

5 For more information about al-Ghazālī's view on this, please have a look at: (Ormsby 1984).

6 For more information on the problem of evil from the perspective of Ibn Sīnā, see: (Inati 2000).

7 The idea of Mullā Ṣādrā's substantial movement is also explained in the author's book: Jahangiri, *Das Konzept der Seele bei Sabziwārī*, 84–87.

8 *Man kāna li-llāhi kāna llāhu lahu.*

9 Functionalization is a kind of demystification and bonification of the evil. The biological capacity of an individual to suffer represents something positive, because suffering signals to a living being that it has not optimally adapted to its environment. By adopting strategies to avoid suffering, a living being improves its adaptation and increases its reproductive success. In other words, it helps one build character. Nevertheless, Stosch holds the opinion that functionalization of the evil should be treated with caution, because in the case of the suffering of other people and especially of children, functionalization is inadmissable. Pedagogization regards evil as a test of God and means that suffering is seen as an instrument of a divine will to perfect man morally or to trigger a maturing process in us. Misery and suffering thus serve to realize something positive, which would not be possible in a suffering-free world. However, this kind of bonification has its problems, like, for example, using immoral means in the course of educating. And the teleological depotentiation is a kind of the hereafter-oriented, soul-building process. It is compared with the joys of the future life in 'paradise,' so the suffering of a lifetime on earth is relativized. Moreover, salvation and damnation at the end of the world represent a sufficient form of compensatory justice for the suffering suffered on earth.

10 The term *badāʾ* is derived from the root *bdw* and means 'new creation,' or 'coming into existence from nothing' (Ibn Manẓūr 1988, 333f.).

11 Or also named as *tabula secreta* according to (Corbin 1993, p. 55).

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